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No 8

1

An essay on Menstruation.

Menstruation is that function, whereby a periodical sanguineous fluid is eliminated every lunar month.

The several appellations that this action has received, are as curious as unmeaning. In the earliest periods of Medical science it received the fanciful names of *Serous*, *Florus*, *Cours*, *Ses Vel*, and at a more recent date writers have substituted the words *Catamenia*, *Menstruation* or *Menses*, terms more happily selected as they express the periodical monthly recurrence.

The period of life at which this highly interesting function takes place is dependent upon climate, constitution, and state of society. In this Country, subjected however to very many exceptions, it generally commences between the ages of thirteen and fifteen.

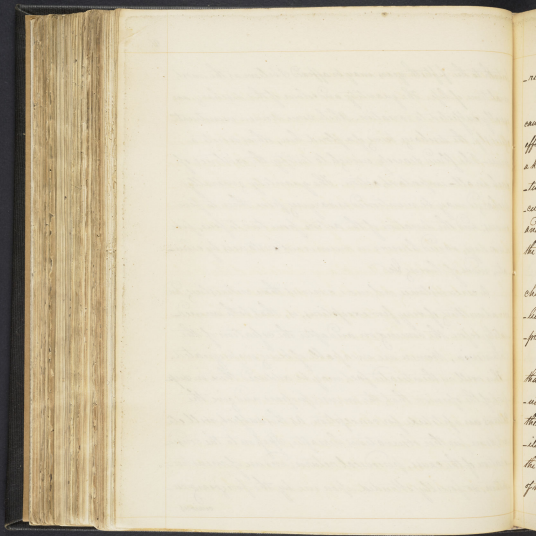
The no less interesting period of its extinction or final cessation is alike ambiguous and subject to deviations. From the

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fortieth to the fiftieth years may be affixed I believe as the most usual time of life. The quantity and colour of this discharge are equally subjected to variation. While some Women menstruate copiously, the discharge being of a florid hue, others secrete a serous-like fluid scarcely enough to testify the existence of such an all-important action. The quantity generally discharged may be mentioned as varying from three to five ounces, and the duration of the action from two to four, five or six days, varied however in numerous instances by climate, mode of living &c.

A circumstance not more curious than interesting, and one admitting of very few exceptions, is, that, both immediately before the coming on and after the cessation of the Catamenia, Women are incapable of being impregnated.

This well authenticated fact, may be adduced then in support of the opinion that, the menses prepare and give the Uterus an aptitude for conception. As this subject, will elicit some further observations hereafter, I pass on to the consideration of the cause, periodical return, and use of menstruation, so forcibly attested upon me by the foregoing curious



-rious and interesting circumstances.

The production of the Menstrues has been attributed to various causes. By some of the humoral pathologists it was held as the effect of a ferment in the circulatory system, which produced a kind of effervescence, the blood by virtue of this eddying action became attenuated and in some degree heated, the circulation in consequence of which process, became accelerated and some portion of the volume of blood was forced through the arteries of the uterus, and thus the Catamenia were evolved.

I shall not here attempt any reputation of this truly chimerical offspring of an already discarded doctrine, be-
-lieving its eccentricity too apparent to warrant the consum-
-ption of time it would require.

By others a theory not less calculated to excite a smile than to enlist our our praise in beholding the varied ingen-
-uity of speculatists, attributes it to Lunar influence; a theory perhaps attributable to their idea of a supposed sim-
-ilitude existing between the fluids of the human body and the waters of the ocean, the latter being under the influence of the phases of the Moon, thereby giving rise to the phenom-
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-mon of tides, and to these they compared menstruation.

Now, that menstruation is not dependent on the Moon for its existence, is very evident, and satisfactory, since there is not a day in which there are not many women subjected to this evacuation, and moreover there are not fewer in the decrease, than there are during the increase of the Moon.

(Satisfied with this planetary explanation of such a mysterious and interesting phenomenon, the restless & commendable spirit of writers prompted them to seek some happier solution of one of nature's greatest arcana, nor was their troubled imagination long in the search ere it found a resting place in the adoption of plethora.

From the time of Galen its illustrious author, this theory has existed and received the approbation of some of the most accomplished philosophers of another age; among whom the justly celebrated Boerhaave and the no less illustrious Haller, we find offering a voluntary patronage to a theory that descends to present days with advocates, whose judgments are perverted by the reverential deference paid to the opinion of these great men. Plethora which has been

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assigned as the efficient agent, in the production of menstruation has been said by some to be general, by others local, which they termed congestion. To each of these I shall now endeavour to offer some objections, and first,

In yielding an assent to general plethora as being the cause of the menses, ought we not to find some other cause sufficiently for its production, at the period of life when the Catamenia commence, rather than at any other period; but no such agent seems to exist, —

Again, if the Catamenia are tributary to this general plethora for their causation, is it not fair to conclude, is it not a rational and legitimate deduction to pronounce, that more others than plethoric women menstruate. Now we well know that delicacy or emaciation of the female habit, unattended by constitutional disease, is no barrier to this periodical evacuation. Will not, therefore the candid and unbiased judgments of the advocates of this plethoric doctrine, yield assent to its renunciation, when it is without prevarication said, that its existence would be a subversion of the ordinary course of nature

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should a part, only of the female race be favoured with the catamenial discharge.

If a sufficiency already has not been advanced for the refutation of this plethoric theory, let us for a moment, accord and say it is the only and true cause, and while supposition enjoys our attention, let us imagine this plethora to exist to some specific quantity and let this be five ounces that are thrown off at each catamenial period. It follows then, that if this superabundant blood be taken from a vein, at, or just, before the menses are to flow, they would be procrastinated to the next regular period. If double the quantity of blood be lost, two periods must elapse ere it can recur.

That, this is not the case, either as to time or the quantity of the menstrual fluid, experience and experiment abundantly testify. Happily then for the continuation of the human species is pleased the beneficent Maker to ordain it otherwise.

The doctrine of general plethora being of itself insufficient, to explain the production of Menstruation, it has undergone, as was above hinted, some modification. In the general,

some have added local plethora, or congestions in the uterine vessels.

Of this opinion are J. Cullen; who supposes, that, in consequence of the gradual evolution of the system, at a certain period of life, the vessels of the Uterus are dilated and filled, and that by this congestion these vessels are stimulated to a stronger action, by which their extremities are forced open and pour out blood.

Thus ingeniously has the illustrious Cullen explained the efficient cause of menstruation; but is this the true cause?

Verily I believe not, and with great diffidence I truce-
-lously advance to offer some objections.

Why dilated and filled vessels we must understand, which was, no doubt, the author's idea, sinuses or receptacles for the blood. Now that, these never exist in the unimpregnated uterus, is known from the dissections of Morgagni; whose assiduity and indefatigable anxiety for knowledge, combined with very many opportunities of examining bodies at various periods of existence could never shew; nor, have the more recent, though less favourable dissections of modern Anatomists, been able to demonstrate these re-
reservoirs

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voies. Whence arises this plethora? Is the female economy possessed of a power that can with such exactness prepare a superfluous quantity of blood, and determine its elimination to the periodical lapse of twenty eight days. Unfortunately for the doctrine physiology does not present to us, the existence of such power.

If this theory of topical congestion be true, how can it account for the blood thus discharged not appearing like any other blood, since we well know that menstrual blood loses its power of coagulation? And moreover were it owing to this, whence do obstructions arise? Agreeably to this doctrine, obstructions are attributable to rigidity of the uterine vessels: but this cannot be the case, as we cannot imagine the resistance of the vessels in diseased menstruation to be greater, than it was previous to the first menstrual evacuation; and more particularly since interruptions occur to delicate Women.

Again and lastly; if this be the efficient cause, why does it not occur in pregnancy and force open the extremities of the uterine vessels and destroy the fetus with a sanguineous

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"sweeping torrent;" Having now adduced some of the principal opinions that have been advanced to account for a function at once so interesting and so dubious to the procreation of our species, and finding them more or less defective and inadequate to solve the mysterious fact, it becomes necessary that one, less objectionable and accompanied with a greater semblance to truth should now be offered, nor do I advance to the compliance of this necessity too sanguinely; notwithstanding that the opinion I am about to offer has its foundation, in the inability of parts to commence those actions they ^{are} destined for, until they have received their ultimate development.

The explanation that appears to me, to be the most satisfactory or at least the most plausible, is, that when the ovaria and uterus have attained their necessary development, which perhaps for the most part is simultaneous, they then take on their final actions; in virtue of that change the ovaria have undergone; or to express it more pertinently, in consequence of the state of perfection the ovaria now possess, they influence

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through the medium of that power termed sympathy, the internal surface of the uterus to the secretion of the menstrual fluid, which takes place as other secretions of the body do.

That menstruation is dependent on the ovaries for its occurrence cannot be doubted, since it is known that, where extensive disease has existed in these organs, or where they have been extirpated, or have not received sufficient development, this secretion does not take place.

Nor does this opinion appear to be wholly gratuitous, since the menstrual evacuation does not occur until about the fourteenth year, when it is reasonable to suppose the uterine system has attained its ultimate development.

On the regular occurrence of the Menstrues I shall now proceed to offer some observations.

It cannot be a matter of surprise, that the cause of the regular recurrence of the menstrual discharge, should have excited the attention and exercised the ingenuity of those, who endeavoured to solve the intricacy of its efficient cause; and accordingly we find the advocates of the plethoric theory, ascribing

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-ing it to the gradual accumulation of this fulness, which continues very gradually till at length it becomes so abundant, as to be forced through the weaker and more depending vessels, which were imagined to be those of the uterus.

It was in this way the periodical recurrence of menstruation was explained by the plethoric theorists; and indeed could the plethoric theory be established, this would be a happy and rational explanation. But, while reviewing the theories on the cause of menstruation, the plethoric doctrine was shown to be untenable; therefore, any reputation that could now be entertained to the recurrence of the menses, advanced upon this doctrine; would but involve the objections that were then advanced.

Planetary influence, which was once assigned as the cause of menstruation, has been, with the same avidity, applied to unravel its regular recurrence. This opinion supported by Dr. Cassini, certainly could never have received the slightest sanction from him, since the acknowledgement of its being the cause, would be direct proof that all women menstruate at one and the same time. How to reconcile

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the time of the commencement, with the regularity of menstruation, it will be necessary to have all females born on the same day of the moon; the admission of which, would be certainly the prototype of absurdity.

I am aware that, a more recent explanation has been offered through the influence of habit. Though more modern, yet it is nevertheless alike objectionable; to impute the recurrence of such an all-important function to habit, the acceptance of the very term would in the language of reputation, be an *"ipse dixit"*; is detracting from the beauty and manifestation of divine wisdom so strikingly illustrated in the formation and functions of the animal economy. Believing this opinion unsusceptible of defence, I will diminish its disguise with this question, Can those who advocate the influence of habit, as effective in producing this recurrence, adduce one instance of any important action in the system, that is dependent on habit for its existence? To this question I believe I may negatively answer, and affirm that habit or any influence it is capable of exerting, is totally incompetent to

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account for the fact under consideration.

From what source then shall we seek a clue to conduct us through this labyrinth? Certainly from that which promises us the strongest probability of success; and that source will be found in the acknowledgement that the uterus possesses its proportion of excitability; by which is meant that property of living matter, that renders it susceptible of action from stimuli.

Now I believe the stimulus that is imparted by the ovum to the uterus through the medium of sympathy, thereby giving rise to menstruation as has been before observed; produces an expenditure of this excitability, just as it becomes expended in other parts of the body when they take on action; and I believe this action continues as long as the excitability continues, or rather, from its being nearly exhausted it can no longer maintain it. The uterus being thus circumstanced, its secretion must cease until a sufficiency of time has elapsed for the restoration of its exhausted excitability; and for this purpose, it generally requires about twenty-eight days; a period

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The uterus after this lapse of time being now possessed of its original excitability, becomes again susceptible to the stimulus of the ovaria, which it obeys and again the menses are evolved.

Having spoken of the cause and the recurrence of menstruation, I will now conclude with some observations on its use.

The menstrual blood was said by ancient authors to possess many strange and even noxious qualities. Misled by their particular hypotheses, they imagined it to be a depuration of noxious humours, which unless thrown off would prove detrimental to the system. This opinion indicative of the crudities that prevailed in the dawn of physiological speculation, received its origin no doubt from the circumstance of the extravasated fluid, in warm climates particularly, becoming entangled in the neck of the vagina and thereby undergoing the putrefactive process. That the menses are a healthy

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evacuation cannot now be doubted, and happily for the female creation no legislative interdiction nor proclama-
-tions, the removal of the freedoms of the conjugal state illegal.

The use of menstruation appears to be, to preserve the uterus in a fit state for impregnation. To this conclusion, observation has amply proved that women who do not menstruate, or who are not in that state that disposes them to take on this action, cannot conceive; even though they should have periodical evacuations of blood from other parts of the system.

In corroboration of this opinion may be adduced, that the brute creation at the time of their being salacious, or in a fit state for the propagation of their species, have a mucus discharge analogous, and no doubt of equal utility to menstruation. It is at this time and no other, that we observe them copulating with their species; and consequent to this we discover their impregnation. It is therefore not a presumption, but legitimate conclusion to say, that this mucus discharge from the generative organs of animals, proves that they are in a fit state for
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-able to the propagation of their species; and the Catamenia
prove the same susceptibility in Women —

12

At the request of the Board of Directors
of the American Museum of Natural History
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of
the sum of \$100.00 from the Treasurer of the
Museum.

Very respectfully,
J. A. Allen
Secretary

Received of the Treasurer of the
American Museum of Natural History
the sum of \$100.00 for the year 1888.